FLOOD RELIEF SCHEME INCHES TO STARTLINE

By Liam Timmins

Feedback for the ongoing Ballinasloe Floor Relief Scheme was requested in its third public consultation proposing potential measures mitigating water damage in town.

The scheme, proposed jointly by the Office of Public Works and Galway County Council, aims to minimise fluvial flooding caused by the River Suck in thetown's low-lying areas. Ballinasloe has long experienced damages caused by the local stream overflowing, particularly in November 2009, Winter 2015/2016, and even last year in Brackernagh. This project funded through the National Development Plan 2018-2027 aims to protect an estimated 309 properties across town, between both business and homes.

In partnership with engineering consultants Arup and Hydro-Environmental Ltd, several possible measures have been examined in town's most affected areas accounting for worst-case-scenario flooding. Following years of consultation and assessment, the most effective measures have been showcased and proposed to the public last February.

In Deerpark, concrete reinforcements are suggested on Kilclooney Bridge on the headwall and base, along with altered culvert inlets. Derrymullen North will see raised road levels with demountable defences, along with improvements to existing flooding defences in the South.

Sarsfield and Station Roads will see alterations to existing flow channels, stock proof fencing, introduction of drainage channels and elevated embankment measures. Similar action will be taken near the Pines and Portnick.

At the East Bridge on Main Street, the existing parapet and concrete wall will be demolished to facilitate the reopening of its historic arch, now reinforced with reinstated footpaths and improved parapets. Reinforced defence walls will also be introduced to the existing Murray Merchants' hardware store.

Following a final public exhibition this Autumn featuring the chosen reliefs for this scheme, statutory consent will be requested from the Department of Public Expenditure. Detailed designs and procurements are scheduled to be produced in 2026 along with the commencement of construction.

This project has already faced significant delays, with the council waiting on approval for nearly a decade. Nine years ago, Cllr Michael Connolly led a delegation to the Dept. vocalizing the town's flooding issues to then OPW Minister Simon Harris. In May 2018, the town was included in the Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Management Plan recommending a flood relief scheme be developed.

The latest scheme maintains that the environmental, architecture and built heritage of town must be considered in these reliefs with appraisals conducted by Ryan Hanley Ltd. Many local councillors have continuously expressed their frustrations during this process with never-ending environmental reports delaying this scheme from being approved.

"As much as possible, we need to fast-track this now and bring it to fruition" encouraged Cllr Michael Connolly in a recent interview with Ballinasloe LIFE, "Sooner than later, we will have another flooding event". The former MDC Cathaoirleach expressed the urgency needed to protect properties against damage along with the consequences of Climate Change on the town's environs.

"I have been very critical for the longest time for the lack of an emerging preferred route for the flooding relief in Ballinasloe. There is an emerging preferred route now, we know exactly where we are going".

Senator Aisling Dolan states "Many people highlighted the urgency of this project especially those living close to rising floodwaters and the positive engagement of residents and landowners in moving this major project forward is very welcome."

"We need to see this project move to detailed design stage and to implement measures which reduce any further threat of flooding to Ballinasloe" she concludes.

The latest Public Consultation phase on this scheme is concluded, but if you require any further information on this project you can contact their email at ballinasloefrs@arup.com or visit their website at www.floodinfo.ie/frs/en/ballinasloe/project-info/.

Minister for Communications and Environment and Junior Minister Boxer Moran at OPW, announcing details of the €8.6 millon for the scheme at the Bridge in May 2018 - 6 years ago!